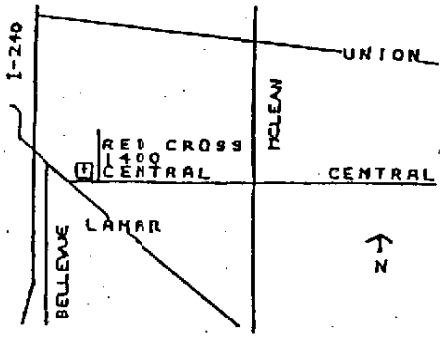
NOTICES

MEETING
7:00 P.M.
Thursday, JUNE 18th
Red Cross Building
1400 Central Av.

WORKSHOP
TO BE ANNOUNCED

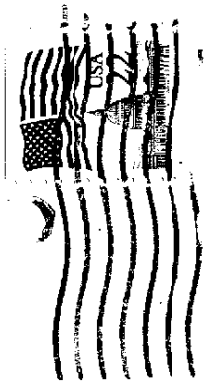


MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

NAME _____ | | $15.00 FAMILY
ADDRESS _____ | | $10.00 JUNIOR (under 15)
CITY _____ ST ZIP _____ | | $10.00 ASSOCIATE (N/L only)
PHONE( ) - : INTERESTS _____

EQUIPMENT, ETC. _____

Detach and mail with check payable to: Mid-South 99 Users Group, P.O. Box 38522, Germantown, Tn, 38183-0522.



MID-SOUTH 99/4A USERS GROUP
MEMPHIS TENNESSEE
NEWSLETTER
P.O. BOX 38522, GERMANTOWN, TN 38183-0522

TIDBITS

JUNE INDEX

Memoirs of a Past President...2
Fair Report.....4
In The News.....5
DSR Ram Project.....8
New Horizons Ramdisk.....8
Personal Profile.....10
Program Bit.....11
Questions And Answers.....12
Shoppers Corner.....14
Tiny Gram.....15
Tower Review.....16
GPL Programing -Part 2.....18
Editors Note.....18

Newsletter for the MID-SOUTH 99 USERS GROUP Vol 5, #6 June 87

T I D B I T S

MEMOIRS OF A PAST PRESIDENT

Once upon a time..A voice from the past....

How do you start an article like this anyway? Oh well, I guess the best place to start is somewhere close to the beginning.

As a few ancient and decrepit souls may remember, back during the winter of '83 (January, '83 to be exact) Dick O'Vandenberg, Lee Avant (Vandenberg), Brenda (my lovely wife) and I started talking about forming a users group for owners of Texas Instruments 99/4A computers. We had just purchased ours back in late '82 (I got mine for Christmas.) We began looking around for others who might also be interested in forming a group of this type. We found several. Curtis Ringold had even written to TI for a group starter kit and had put out some forms at different stores to test the waters.

In February, '83, the founding fathers of this now famous group met for the first time in our den to begin the job of organizing a real group. Those present at this first meeting were Curtis Ringold, Wallace McDonald, Dick Vandenberg, Lee Avant, Fonz and Linda Allen, Bert Jones and Brenda and me. We spent the next two plus months of defining and refining the by-laws, electing the first slate of officers, naming committee chairmen and deciding on the meeting format. In April, we notified TI of our existence so they would publish name in their bi-monthly newsletter (yes, TI used to support user groups and every TI owner used to get a newsletter from TI.) We held our first "public" meeting in May in one of the meeting rooms at the Mall of Memphis. We were expecting 15-20 people and were swamped by over fifty in a room designed for 30. Our first major problem had just surfaced - where to find a place big enough for a crowd this size?

In late May, The Computer Center opened in Poplar Plaza Shopping Center. They had a large meeting/class room in the basement capable of holding 60-65 people they were willing to let us use and they even paid for our postage bill to mail the newsletter.

With a permanent meeting place and official recognition from TI, we set the June meeting (and subsequent meetings) for the 2nd Thursday of the month. We contacted everyone who had shown any interest in the group and told them of the date, time and place of the June meeting and 35-40 people attended. TI published our name and address (mine) in their June newsletter.

One Saturday afternoon in late June, I was catching a couple of winks on the couch when the doorbell rang. Brenda answered the door and there stood an eleven-year old boy wanting to know something about the users group. Brian Abbot had just gotten his

June TI newsletter and had ridden his bike over to our house to find out what the group was all about. He informed Brenda he was a experienced programmer and wanted to join our group. The Kid's Korner was born. Also in June, Brenda took over the newsletter and it began to take on the shape and form you see today.

After a fairly successful June meeting we began actively seeking people to work on the different committees, publishing a regular newsletter, holding business meetings and attempting to set up a library. Wallace McDonald had to withdraw as chairman of the library committee, we still had no chairman for the program or education committees and we were trying to get ready for the July meeting.

75 people showed up at the July meeting and we were out of space again. After several months of talking with the Memphis City Schools and several other places, trying to find a room to hold 100-200 people, we were able, thanks to Larry Garrett, to get the school board to let us use their public meeting room and we set up the schedule for our meetings there to start in December. We immediately began making plans for public service announcements in the media to let people know we were here.

On October 28, 1983, Texas Instruments announced they were withdrawing from the home computer market and we had a whole new set of issues to deal with. Would we still be a viable group? Whould we attempt to branch out into other areas of interest? These and many other questions were asked. The answer were, and still are, yes, we will remain viable and for some period following that announcement, we continued to grow.

The officers that first year were; President - Howard Watson (me), Vice-president - Fonz Allen, Secretary - Lee Avant, Treasurer - Curtis Ringold. Committee chairmen were; Community Relations - Bert Jones, Education - Liz Davis, Equipment - Dick Vandenberg, Library - Bob Conner, Newsletter - Brenda Watson, Program - Dick Mahoney, Teen Corner - Chris Allen, Kid Korner - Brian Abbott, Teen Sponsor - Linda Allen, Kid's Sponsor - Brenda Watson. Many of these same people also served on other committees.

In December, we elected new officers and prepared for the coming year of uncertainty and confusion following TI's announcement. The other two nominees for President campaigned very hard on my behalf and since it was one against two, I was re-elected.

1984 was a good year. We grew to almost 200 members, expanded our library, built relationships with several other users groups (many of whom are still in existence today) and started the Saturday workshops.

We elected Bert Jones as President for 1985 and he was so pleased, he served for one meeting and moved out of town leaving Gary Cox holding the bag. Gary served well as the President during a somewhat turbulent year which saw us lose our meeting place over a teachers strike, the establishment of the bulletin board and a shrinkage of membership as the machines got older and people became enamored of the IBM PC. It was during 1985 that we moved to the present location for our meetings.

Gerald Smith was elected President for 1986 and served ably (if often absently due to his work load) in that post. Gerald was able, with the help of some very dedicated people, to hold the group together and increase the size of the library and bulletin board.

As you all know, Mac Swope is doing an excellent job as the current President and his entire board and committee members are to be commended for a job well done.

In this little history lesson, I have dwelled more on the early days of the group because that was when I was more heavily involved, but the job of the last three presidents (Gary, Gerald and Mac) has been much tougher than mine was. I didn't have to contend with trying to hold together a group dedicated to an "orphan" machine. All I had to do was preside over a group dedicated to (at that time) the most popular home computer on the market. Gary, Gerald and Mac, and all their committees and you, the die-hard members, deserve the real credit...Howard Watson

FAIR REPORT

The May 16th General Computer Fair held at State Tech here in Memphis was a GREAT success! Every brand computer club in Memphis attended showing off the best of their equipment. Among the clubs in attendance were Commodore, Apple, Atari, Franklin, Adam, I.B.M., Osborne, Tandy, Timex/Sinclair, Kaypro, Amiga, Atari St, Coco, Sanyo and of course the Mid-South TI99/4A User Group! Our club had 4 complete systems setup three of which had a Gram Kracker and one with a printer. In all we took up 5 tables one of which we displayed the various publications and catalogs available for the TI99/4A. On the each system we had demonstration programs running such as the Apesoft Graphics Demo, Ernie and Bert speech demo, Space Shuttle demo, MUSIC and just anything that anyone wanted to see. Upon request, I demonstrated to several people TI-Artist and Joypaint 99 of which everyone was impressed. What attracted the most attention though was the Ernie and Bert demonstration as the speech in the program seemed to attract everyone to see what it was. We had several banners printed up displaying our name as well as a bunch of MAX/RLE pictures printed up. Instead of using MAX/RLE to print the pictures, I use Joypaint 99 to get an enlarged picture and I think those pictures were the second favorite attraction at our table.

The other groups had some very impressive equipment setup as well such as a digitizer of which pictures of people were made on the spot and then converted into computer format and printed. This is the same manor of which many of the pictures for MAX/RLE are made. Other groups played fantastic music created by their computer. The IBM group had an elaborate plotter system setup (CAD) which is even more sofisticated than what I have seen at college! Each computer club showed something of their system which made theirs unique from the rest. If you missed the fair you really missed a great show. Estimates of the crouds range from 700 to even 1000 people.

I would like to thank those in our club who volunteered to bring their equipment to the fair and also a thanks to Max Gresson for showing his setup of his TI PRO in his van. Many people took a look at Max's van setup where he had complete TI Professional System setup and running on internal power for use when he travels complete with printer and even a modem for use through connection on a land line or VIA radio phone. With all the electronics in h van it looked more like a space craft than a van.

Also a thanks goes to the kind people in the Commodore Club who helped everyone bring in their equipment. This was the first time that I did not have to carry everything in myself! This fair was by the way organized by the Commodore club of Memphis and the fair is planned to become an annual event. A second fair for the fall is already in the planning stages. If anything, the fair brought all the different brand computer clubs in Memphis together and I think we all found that the best computer was the one we are happiest with as each computer has capabilities unique within itself. A user group association is planned to be formed between the groups to help relations between us and to help get out information to everyone about the clubs. I encourage clubs in other cities to try a similar general computer fairs.

Wide spread publicity was provided on TV, Radio and newspaper about the fair and it brought many new members to all the clubs from people who before did not know they existed... I even ran across someone who was one of the original starters of Corcomp a long time ago!... Gary Cox

IN THE NEWS

MG (Millers Graphics) has released 6 of their game programs, Battle Over Titan, The Pharroh's Tomb, Casino Blackjack, Blackbird's Treasure, The Crazy Fun House and Alphabet Soup into one menu driven disk for $20 (shipping included). Requirements are X-BASIC and a disk system. I have seen some of the games and they are very good. MG also sells a very good game and tutorial book together called Night Mission for $19.95 (cassette or disk), a powerful utility called Advanced Diagnostics for $19.95, Smart Programming Guide for Sprites for $6.95, New PROM set for Corcomp disk Controller Card for $34.95 (shipping included) and several other items. Unless otherwise mentioned price does not include shiping. Their address is MG, 1475 W. CYPRESS AVE., SAN DIMAS, CA 91773 - (714) 599-1431.

Bytemaster Computer Services of 171 Mustang Street, Sulphur, LA 70663 has released the Explorer package once marketed by MG. It allows you to gaze into the inner workings of the 99/4A. It a ws you to Track, Display, Edit and Search VDP memory, CPU h ory or GROM/GRAM Memory. Furthermore, you can set breakpoints for pausing executions at ROM, RAM, VDP, GROM or GRAM addresses. Explorer displays the current Registers, GPL Status and VDP Registers and each machine instructions is disassembled. Screen options allows arithmetic and logical operations in Decimal, Hex and Binary. Requires, Disk System, Memory Expansion and either

XB, E/A, Mini Memory or GK. Price is $24.95 plus $2 shipping. Bytemaster is also releasing in June String Master which provides powerful string manipulation capabilities such as PEEK and POKE string variables to and from VDP or CPU memory, TRIM or LTRIM unwanted leading or trailing characters, CONCTL or CONCTR concatenates any combination of string variables and string arrays... Price is $19.95 plus $2 shipping.

Tex-Comp of P.O. Box 33064, Granada Hills, CA 91344 is marketing what they call the NMQ TI99/4A Video Interface. It replaces your video modulator if you have your computer connected to a TV. Although I have not seen it they say it produces a much better quality picture. The device also works with other computers, video games, cam-corders and video recorders. This might solve your problem if you get a bad picture from your computer on your TV. Price is $34.95 plus shipping. Tex-Comp's phone number is (818) 366-6631.

Texaments of 53 Center St. Patchogue, NY 11772 (516) 475-3480 has announced a Turbo Pascal System for the TI99/4A. This is a programming language simular to that found on the IBM PC. Requires 32k, disk system and Editor/Assembler cartridge. Price is $79.95.

For those of you that have the Disk Utilities program by John Birdwell his address has changed. His new address is 7052 Springhill Circle, Eden Prairie, MN 55344.

The next Chicago TI Faire will be held November 7, 1987 at Triton College in River Grove Illinois. Our members have attended for the last two years so lets start planning now to attend this one! November 8 a continuation of the faire will be held a little ways north of Chicago by another user group. I will give more information as I receive it.

Version 4.2 of Mass-Transfer has been released. This new version corrects a few small bugs and among the new features is a new type of file transfer called YMODEM which is faster than XMODEM transfer. Also recently received are 10 more disks of MAX/RLE pictures. Mass-Transfer 4.2 and some of the pictures are available in the download section on Risky Business BBS at 901-726-5623. The programs will also be soon be added to the library.

Rumor has it that someone is working on a TI/IBM/Apple computer system that will cost around $1200. The phone number that I have for information on this is 1-800-USA-994A. I will have more information on this as I receive it. I am curious as to how someone is going to have a 3 in one system like this!

Disk Only Software of P.O. Box 244, Lorton, Virginia 22079 has the first supplement to the Orphan Survival Handbook available for $8.97 plus $2 shipping. Specify supplement #1 when ordering. By the way the Orphan Survival Handbook is a collection of material taken from many user group newsletters giving tips and tricks for the TI99/4A. It is currently selling for $17.95 plus $2 shipping. User Group discounts are available on the Orphan Survival Handbook if we order 5 or more... DOS also markets some new programs

called Lotto Mania Lottery Game for $19.95, Pro Test Utility where you build your own Educational Tests for $17.95, Shopping List for $13.95, Dragon Storm and Piranha action games both in a set for $14.95, Currency Exchange Utility giving exchange conversions in major countries for $17.95, Public Domain RLE pictures volumes 1 through 10 for $6 per volume, Flying Fortress Flight Simulator for $19.95 and lastly Karate action game for $14.95. All programs are available on disk only. Their phone number to order by credit c[illegible] is (301) 369-1339. (add $2 shipping.)

The following information obtained from the May K-Town Newsletter of Knoxville Tennessee. Information edited from the Boston Fair report by Mike Dodd.

John Dow who wrote Dow 4 Gazelle flight simulator many years ago is now working on a new all assembly language flight simulator which is almost ready. More information on this when I receive it.

Genial Computerware of P.O. Box 183, Grafton, MA 01519 is marketing a new Extended BASIC debugger program called XB:BUG. Price is $15. Also new is XBASHER written by Mike Dodd himself. This program is designed to compact Extended BASIC programs by compacting lines, shortening variables, removing REMs and a few other techniques. This program is similar program to the Oak Tree Systems smash program. Price is $10.

Rave 99 is now marketing a PEB interface for the speech synthesizer which allows you to plug your speech synthesizer into [illegible]rd and put it into the PEB. Price for the card is $50. Their a[illegible]ess is 112 Rambling Rd. Vernon CT 06066.

ML systems P.O. Box 268, Valley Falls, RI 02864 is marketing a IBM keyboard interface for the TI99/4A. The cost is $80 for the interface but does not include the keyboard. IBM keyboards range anywhere from $30 and up. The interface has fifty pre-programmed keywords that the keyboard will automatically send to the computer with one keystroke. Some of the commands are OLD DSK, SAVE DSK, LIST, RUN "DSK, CALL CLEAR, CALL INIT, CALL LOAD, ACCEPT AT(, OPEN#, PIO and a bunch more. Hooking up requires only three connections and no soldering. Expansion system is not required. This is nice if you want to get a nicer keyboard than the TI99/4A's.

LOCAL NEWS:

Work on the new improved UG library is still underway. A note will be in the newsletter when the work is completed.

If you have tried to call our TIBBS board in the past month you might have had some problems such as no answer or problems with th[illegible] system itself. A MAJOR hardware failure occurred on May 4th a[illegible]much data was lost. However, the system is now back online while repairs are still underway.

As a closing note I would like to ask for HELP! We only have a few people in the group carrying large portion of the workload and it is a lot of work to run a user group! Anything anyone can do to

help would be greatly appreciated. What can you do? How about writing an article for the newsletter? If you can not think of something to write, we have plenty of articles from other groups newsletters that you can type in. Help is also needed in production of the newsletter as it took Al Doss and me 4 hours just to fold the newsletters last month! If you can get to the meetings before 7pm how about volunteering to bring equipment to the meeting as I have been bringing parts of my system now for three years! How about volunteering to demonstrate something or suggest something to demonstrate... The only way this group is going to survive is through the efforts and help of everyone... Gary Cox

DSR RAM PROJECT

John Clulow, original author of the New Horizons's Ramdisk Operating System (ROS), has developed a FANTASITIC new product for the TI. This new hardware/software product allows implementation of an additional 16K of memory to the TI. This extends the 32K now used to 48K of memory. John has managed to introduce memory that can be used in the DSR ROM area as non-DSR RAM. Some people may wonder what the benefits of such a device would be. I will tell you!!! One of the main advantages I have already read are that the authors of programs like PRBASE and DM1000 are already modifying their programs to accomodate this additional memory. This means doubling the size of most data base programs and more features to others. In addition, J. P. Hoddie, author of the 80 column version of TI-Writer for the Myarc 9640, has made plans to enhance the features available on the TI-99/4A version of TI-Writer. This in itself, could be worth the purchase of the hardware project. Just think, larger buffers on terminal emulator programs, quicker disk copiers, larger and better graphic programs, etc could be in the palm of your hand.

Already since his first release of info on this project, additional features have been added to the board. Currently, a real time clock/calendar can be added to the card at a minimal cost. Additionally, John Clulow has plans of adding GramKracker capabilities to the card at only another $40-50 investement.

For people that have seen the MENU program on the New Horizons Ramdisk. The program has been modified to load and execute from this space. More info on MENU can be found in the newsletter on the New Horizons Ramdisk Article.

If anyone is interested in ordering such a kit, expected cost is around $40. I will be taking orders at the next User Group meeting so if anyone is interested in ordering, the time is now as we may be able to get a user group discount if we have a large enough order (usually 5 or more)...Keery Miller

NEW HORIZONS RAMDISK

At this month's meeting, I will be demonstrating features

available for the new operating system and MENU loader for the New Horizons Ramdisk. Currently, there are 3 versions of the card. There is the 90K, 180K, and the 256K ramdisk. I have the 180K version and from what I hear, Gary Cox is on his way of upgrading his 90K version to 180K. A ramdisk emulates a disk drive, however since it operates on chips and not a floppy disk, it operates at lightening speed. Typical loading times of even the longest programs are now accomplished in 2-3 seconds.

Additional Note: J. P. Hoddie has now even shortened the loading times in half by replacing the HM6264-LP15 ROS chip (RAM) with an Eprom (This eliminates the 1 in 10,000 chance of a system crash).

One of the best features of this ramdisk is that it is battery backed RAM in the peripheral expansion box and will recharge itself. This means that even during a power outage, you will not lose the information contained on the ramdisk for weeks. The only problem I have encountered with the card has not been with the card, but software that contained bugs and played with the Myarc 512K Ramdisk and EXB 2.12 operating system. As far as using without the Myarc 512K card, I have not know of anyone experiencing any difficulties with it. I know of several people operating with three ramdisk in their system and they would not trade it for anything. Offer them a Geneve 9640 and they would probably hesitate.

To begin with, what one can immediately see when booting the system is the optional MENU program if you save it on the ramdisk. If one types CALL AO, in ether basic or extended basic, this turns the autoastic power up routine. CALL AF will turn it off. What this does is load the program MENU on the ramdisk which has two different screens similar in concept to the Funnelweb screen but much more easier to modify and has more versatility. One is capable of setting up the menu to automatically load extended basic or assembly programs from the main menu. The program also has the ability to catalog a disk, view a file, load different managers, etc. The latest version even will talk to you when you first boot up and will speak the time.

The one feature that I like the best, is the CALL DM statement. Whenever you are in basic, typing this statement will automatically boot DM1000 in one second. Imagine having a disk manager available that quick. The MENU program can also be easily modified to boot up to 9 other programs with simple statements. There are so many features and capabilities with this product that they are almost too numerous to mention. The most important is it's speed. The Ramdisk is the best product that was ever built for the TI. Ask any owner of one and he will tell you so.

I recently contacted John Clulow that was a designer of the board. I have learned that the User Group will be able to receive a User Group discount on the kit. If their are enough people, at least 5 orders, one will be able to buy the 180K version in kit form for only $150. This includes the chips and the PC Board that must be ordered. For those people that feel they are not up to building their own, I will be happy to build it for them for only $25. As I said before, I built my own and had it built and running in two nights of work. For those people that have done some soldering

before, you should feel at ease at soldering as this was the first time I ever tried to make anything other than to connect two wires. It is a rather easy and simple to build and the instructions are quite easy to follow. I will be taking orders at the next meeting after the demo for anyone wishing to purchase the kit. If you are one of those that does not want to take a chance, the 180K version can also be purchased already built for $210. Having either a friend or I build it for you, you are saving at least $35. The kit price does require that we have orders...Beery Miller

PERSONAL PROFILE

TIBBS Sysop:

Well, here goes my little piece Al has asked me to contribute... I guess I can start by saying that the user group has really been good to me. I got my TI because the other computer did not have a local user group yet and the TI user group was really hot! After about a year in the group, the SysOp of the old TIBBS had vacated Memphis and we needed a new SysOp to continue with TIBBS. I was very flattered when at the officers' meeting they asked me to take over. I was really excited! The rewards of being TIBBS SysOp has been really great. I have chatted with TI users from all over the country.

Lately though, TIBBS has really had a hard time recovering from a new number and two bad disk crashes. Then this last Saturday a new BBS program came in called TI-NET. Well the program is really great. I have lots of SysOp control right from the board's keyboard. I can even log in from the keyboard. TIBBS does not have anything like it. But, there was one thing missing from TI-NET, a public message system. All it has to offer is a private message system. This is called E-Mail. E-Mail is good to have but not as an only message base. So I have put the TIBBS program back online till I can find something else. It is too bad because TI-NET really had some good features. Supposedly the author is working on a new version that will be 100% assembly. I will be corresponding with him and let him know what is happening.

About myself, I am a native Canadian. I moved to Memphis in late 1967 as a young boy of 11. I went from barely speaking English and going to schools that were all French to all English schools in Memphis. I had a little bit of a problem at first but managed to get through that first year in fourth grade with the help of a very understanding teacher. I went on to finish high school and went to work after graduation. Lately I have been attempting to go back to school and use my home grown knowledge of computers to start a career in the field of programming. I haven't made it yet, but maybe with a little luck I can get there soon because I really love computers!

Well, I have about exhausted my brain cells and the room allowed by our gracious editor. Give the board a call anytime at (901) 386-1760... Pierre K. LaMontagne, TIBBS SysOp...

Risky Business Sysop

Al Doss asked me the other day to write this article for the benefit of others that sometimes wants to know what a Sysop does for a living besides operating his BBS. I am originally from a small town called Bedford in Kentucky that is about 40 miles northeast of Louisville (I'm glad they did not make it to the NCAA as U.K is my team, then M.S.U.) along the river. In May 1986, I completed my Bachelors of Science degree in Chemistry at U.K. During this past summer was when I decided to start my first BBS. I used one that was a TECHIE version, until I upgraded to one that required fewer hassles and was much faster. I decided to go with a BBS called PRO-99 (Freeware) that had more error checking and allowed more options to be user designed. As most of you know, I decided to call the board "Risky Business" and was online in Memphis beginning in October 1986. Since moving to Memphis in August 1986 to work on my Masters degree, I decided to join the User Group here too (I am also a proud member of the Bluegrass 99/4 Computer Society in Lexington). While working on my degree, I have been doing some teaching within the Chemistry Department. Since school let out in May, I turned my summer interests towards three things. The first is I am currently doing research (9am-5pm, M-F) in the field of organic chemistry. In part of my other free time, I work 3 days and then off 3 days at an apartment complex as a security guard (8pm-6am). This averages to around 75 hours per week. My third and most important interest is why I have my second job. As many seem to think they know, they say hell, my fiance has me wrapped around her finger. NOT TRUE, as it is the other way around (hahaha). For those that have not heard already, we will be entering the holy state of matrimony on October 17th at St. Mary's at 1:30 pm. Anyone and everyone is welcome to attend.

As far as where things go from here this summer. It's in the little lady's hand (Oh, I meant to say I will have the last say on this computer (grin)). Please call (901) 726-5623...Beery Miller

PROGRAM BIT

6:00pm - Doors open.

7:00pm - 7:20pm - General discussion and donations taken for a selected Fairware author.

7:20pm - 8:20pm - Demonstration by Beery Miller of the Horizon Ram Disk. This is a device which emulates a disk drive but is 20 times faster! However, the Horizon Ram Disk is much more than just a RAM disk as it has many other features. I purchased one last month and have found it to be a great time saver. A one word description of the Horizon Ram Disk would be "WOW!". If you purchase one be sure to obtain a copy of a public domain operating system for it that Beery and myself have (by the Miami TI UG) that does more than the operating system that comes with it. User group discounts are available if we have enough orders. Beery should have a review on the RAM Disk elsewhere in this newsletter.

8:20pm - 8:50pm - Demonstration by Gary Cox of Tower Air Traffic controller. This program simulates the operations of an air traffic controller at a busy airport. The only thing required to run it is Extended BASIC and a cassette recorder or disk drive. Be sure to bring your blood pressure pills!

8:50pm - 10:30pm - Play period.

10:30pm - Doors Close.

If you have something you would like to see demonstrated or have something you can demonstrate yourself please speak up... Gary Cox

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

During the May 16th general computer fair I was asked a lot of questions. In this article I hope to answer for everyone some of those questions.

WHAT IS A GRAM KRACKER?

I will start off the answer to that question by first giving a little history of the conception of the Gram Kracker. My first exposure to the Gram Kracker (GK for short) was in 1985 at the Chicago TI Fair. Craig Miller of Millers Graphics (now MG) carried the first demonstration of the day which was of a revolutionary new device that he called a "Gram Kracker". If you have never seen a GK, it is a small device about the size of 4 cartridges that plugs into the module port of the TI99/4A. On the front are 5 switches which aid in controlling the device. On top of the GK is a module port for plugging your modules into the device since it is now taking up the module port.

It would take probably the entire newsletter to go through all of what the GK is capable of doing as it provides as much programming potential as most computer users will ever develope. It opens up an entire new area of memory for additional programming and custom modification that until the GK came along could never be accessed. By placing a module on the top of the GK, the GK will then read and save to disk or cassette a complete copy of that cartridge (GK is required to load the cartridge back into the computer.). After loading that cartridge, which I just saved, back into the GK I can then use the memory editor built into the GK to make whatever changes that I would like to the once cartridge based program. The Gram Kracker's memory is backed up by a battery so when I turn off the system it still retains everything in the GK. Extensive knowledge of the TI99/4A (such as knowing assembly language etc...) is needed to make major changes in the cartridge loaded into the GK. However, following other peoples directions and directions in the manual many changes can be made by anyone to fit your own needs therefore custom designing the way my system operates.

However, cartridges are not the only area of memory the GK opens up but I can even load the operating system of the console (which

until the GK was totally inaccessable) and make changes in it. For example, if I have a version 2.2 console which will not run third party software I can take and load the operating system of a non- 2.2 console into the GK and use that operating system rather than the one built into the console thus bypassing the provision by TI where the version 2.2 console would not run third party software! I can furthermore add in my own character set for BASIC, change commands and just explore the inner workings of the TI console using the GK's memory editor which allows me to make direct changes to whatever I see. Furthermore, I now have a backup on disk of all my cartridges if one should ever go bad!

The GK has 80K of memory which can retain several cartridges accessible by a selection on a menu. In my Gram Kracker I have Extended BASIC (which takes up a lot of the memory), Disk Manager 1000 and an enhanced Editor/Assembler along with the E/A Editor and Assembler resident. My XB has been modified to add many additional commands such as a disk catalog, the ability to copy and delete entire sections of programs with just one statement and much more. The possibilities are limited only by my own abilities. Several programs are out such as the GK utility disk and Gram Packer which allows me to custom design my GK to what I like without having to program complicated code myself. Simple things though like changing a default in a cartridge to RS232 to PIO can usually be easily done.

The switches on the front allow me to select what options I would like active such as, "Do I want the second operating system or the original, Do I want DM 1000, or TI BASIC, Do I wish to write protect the device etc... and then the bank switch is needed to direct the contents of a cartridge being loaded to the correct bank (the GK tells you which bank to send it to.).

The GK is truely an outstanding device engineered to very high quality standards with gold plated contacts and switch connections going though rugged quality assurance program before shipped. However, due the the rapid increase in parts prices and the availability of parts which delayed production the GK the GK has been discontinued because it was no longer practical to make it but not for the lack or orders as back orders streched back for months and months. A complete review of the GK is in a back issue of our newsletter and also in the MAY 1986 Micropendium. A somewhat similar device is marketed called a GRAM CARTE however, I have no knowledge of it's capabilities so I am unable to say how good it is...

One more note on the GK it does not make changes to the cartridges itself but just to the copy of it that I make as well as no changes are made to the console chips but just to the copy of it that is loaded into the GK. O yea, the reason this device was called a "Gram Kracker" as it is capable of cracking into an area of memory referred to as GRAM.

IS THERE A DIFFERENCE IN THE QUALITY OF DISKETTES?

Yes. Some brand disks are made to better specifications than others thus that could be the reason that one brand disk cost more than another but price is not a guide to quality. I have not seen

any charts on the specifications of diskettes but from personal experience and word of mouth I have found Polaroid and Sentinal Color Disks to be some of the best quality diskettes available. In particular the Sentinal Color Disks have been used by several system operators of BBS's and have seen a marked improvement in the lifetime of the Sentinals over other brands. With BBS's disks are accessed frequently and eventually they will develop bad sectors. The less quality disks will not last as long as th better quality diskettes. As for myself I usually buy whateva brand is on sale as my disks do not get near as much wear as what BBS's subject disks to. However, for very important data I will use good quality diskettes as well as keeping a backup. Nevertheless, I have had very few problems with disks but that may be due to that I also take extream care of them keeping them in a dust free case when not in use and handeling them with reasonable care. One other thing you will notice about Sentinal Color Diskettes is that they have very thick jackets for more protection. See article "Equipment Problems" in the March 1987 newsletter for more tips on disks.

WHY WILL MY CONSOLE NOT RUN THIRD PARTY SOFTWARE?

Some of the white consoles manufactured by Texas Instruments right before they discontinued the 99/4A were modified to where they would not run some of the software made for the 99/4A by other parties other than Texas Instruments so TI would have a monopoly on software for the machine. However, a device sometimes referred to as a Grom Buster can be purchased to bypass this provision made on these consoles. To tell if you have a version 2.2 console look on the title screen for a 1983 copywrite and a V 2.2 symbol, Possibly someone out there knows how to modify the console without having to buy a Grom Buster. If so please write in! A Gram Kracker will also bypass this provision...Gary Cox

SHOPPERS CORNER

Book Unlimited in Eastgate Shopping Center had 6 books related to the TI99/4A for only $2 a piece! They also carry books on other brand computers for only $2!

Games N Gadgets in the Mall of Memphis still has some TI related software which includes some Navarone Software, Star1Soft for TI, TI-Logo, Multiplan and a few other related items including a good supply of TI brand joysticks. They are the only place in town that still carries any TI specific items.

In the latest Radio Shack flier they are advertising TI RF modulators for $4.95. I would highly recommend picking one up as if yours goes out it could cost as much as $19 to get another one! If you are unable to get one at Radio Shack C. J.'s Wholesale of 14200 East Colonial Dr. Orlando, FL 32826 has the modulators for $5.95 (add $1 shipping per item).

The Front Range 99er Computer Club of P.O. Box 9572, Colorado Springs, CO 80932 is selling videotapes of Craig Miller

demonstrating Triton's new Super Extended BASIC and Turbo XT at their April 6 meeting. Price is $17.50 for non-members. Tapes may be ordered by sending a check or money order or by calling VILLA-TI BBS at (303) 574-2567.

For a great TI only magazine subscribe to Micropendium, P.O. Box 1343, Round Rock, TX 78680. Subscription for a year is $22.25 U.S.A.. If you haven't seen it, you do not know what your are missing!

If you have something you would like to buy or sell contact Al Doss to have it placed here (FREE of charge to non-business members of the group).

Check out Micropendium, Computer Shopper and the For Sale table at our meetings for sale deals on TI software and hardware.

TINY GRAM

The following article was taken from the April 1987 Dallas 99 Interface newsletter of Dallas Texas. The article was written by Mike Stanfill with the program written by Jim Peterson of TIGERCUB Software.

This is the first musical "Tinygram" I've run and it's a goodie! Versatile too! Type it up and run it (in XB) and you'll hear a hammered-dulcimer version of "The Wildwood Flower". But that's not all!

```
1 ! '***** DULCIMER *****
    '*** A TINYGRAM ****
     * By Jim Peterson *

2 CALL CLEAR :: DIM S(26):: F=262 :: FOR N=1 TO 25
:: S(N)=INT(F*1.059463094^(N-1)):: NEXT N :: READ N
:: C=S(N):: D=S(N)

3 RESTORE 7 :: FOR J=1 TO 63 :: GOSUB 5 :: NEXT J

4 U=U+2 :: CALL SOUND(-200,S(N),U,C,U,D,U)
:: IF U>27 THEN U=0 :: GOTO 3 ELSE 4

5 READ N :: CALL SOUND(-500,S(N),0)::
CALL SOUND(-500,S(N),0,C,9)
:: CALL SOUND(- 500,S(N),0,C,9,D,19):: D=C

6 C=S(N):: RETURN

7 DATA 5,6,8,8,10,13,5,5,6,5,3,3,5,3,1,1

8 DATA 5,6,8,8,10,13,5,5,6,5,3,3,5,3,1,1

9 DATA 8,13,17,17,17,15,13,13,8,8,10,10,13,10,8,8

10 DATA 1,1,1,3,5,5,8,5,3,3,5,3,1,1,1
```

Let's say that you wanted to hear another tune. Easy! This program puts a two-octave scale in a 25-element DIMension. Thats what the "DIM S(26)" is all about in line 2. All you have to do is take the tune you want to hear and break it down into its respective parts (Ex, C, B#, etc.) then use the chart below to match it to its DIMensional value:

```
1 2  3 4  5 6 7  8 9  10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22
C C# D D# E F F# G G# A  A# B  C  C# D  D# E  F  F# G  G# A

23 24 25
A# B  C
```

Now put these numbers into the DATA statements. You can make the DATA files as long as you like, the program doesn't care. Each of these numbers is approximately one quarter note long. To make a note longer just list it twice. (Ex. DATA 3,3,3,3 will play twice as long as DATA 3,3. Get it?)

Finally, count all of the numbers in your DATA statements and alter the FOR-TO statement in line 3.

TOWER REVIEW

Tower Civilian Air Traffic Controller is a game by Not-Polyoptics that has been around since 1984 but this is my first exposure to the game which I found quite interesting.

"Tower presents a simulation of a Civilian Air Traffic Controller's duties at Washington's National Airport on a dark, lowering night- visibility poor, ceiling 400 feet or less. Washington's major airport is regarded as one of the most dangerous in the country because of its tight flight paths and stringent noise standards."

At the begining of the game I as asked for a skill level, 1 for beginner, 2 for intermediate or 3 for PRO. As the game begins the screen displays a view of the area around the Washington National Airport with the airport in the center of the screen. The Potomac River is visible as an angular band running from the upper left corner of the display to the center bottom. The river is the main flight path for all planes in order to minimize noise pollution in the surrounding areas. Various objects on the ground are visible such as the Mall area, Pentagon, and high rise clusters on Rosslyn and Crystal City. Located on the right side of the screen are the display's digital readouts giving information on whatever plane I wish giving Flight ID, course, altitude, speed, type plane and flap position. At the top of the screen is displayed the messages from the pilots of the planes and at the bottom of the screen is where I type messages to the pilots of the planes.

As controller my job is to land 5 planes and allow 5 planes to take off. I have ten commands that I can use. The first 6 is intended to be directed toward the pilots of the planes and must be prefaced by a "F" and the letter of the flight. Inputing

"FDI", for example, asks flight D to identify itself. The following messages can be directed toward the planes. A followed by a number for the altitude, C followed by a course number for a change of course, I for requesting a flight identity, H for a flight to hold (circle), FU or FD to raise and lower flaps, N or S to tell a plane to takeoff north or south runway. So for example, if I want flight A to lower it's flaps, decend to 300 feet, change course to 90 degrees I would type, FAFD (ENTER), FAA3 (ENTER) and FC90 (ENTER). Of course, altitude change and course change is not instant as it takes the plane several minutes to reach the altitude and course you ordered. Commands that are entered without the F prefex are I for all flights to identify themself on screen, T for list of planes ready to take off, L for list of planes already landed and ! to pause the game.

The course is entered in degrees with 0 degrees being North, 90 East, 180 South and 270 West with any variations in between. Altitude is entered in feet.

Landing a plane is accomplished by guiding a plane in a correct landing pattern to the edge of one of the runways. For the plane to land it must be near enough to the runway, on the correct course for that runway (180 degrees for North runway and 0 for South runway.) and moving less than 150 knots.

Problems encountered are directing planes around thunderstorms which throw them off course if plane flies through them and you loose points as well. Planes can run out of fuel, flying over the city will loose points because of the noise and a plane flying over the Pentagon might get shot down besides loosing points and there are a few other ways to loose points as well described in the manual. The pilot of the plane will inform you of his predicament such as low on fuel or whatever... On different levels of the game different problems arise such as planes being hijacked, landing gear failing and closer tolarances on landing and less allowable distance between planes. By the way, if two planes at the same altitude get too close it is not a pretty scene!

The game is over when you crash a plane, when 5 planes have been landed or shortly after the 5th plane has taken off.

The game is written in Extended BASIC (no assembly) which causes the response on entering commands a little slow (keyboard acts sluggish) but this is no real problem as it just adds to the tense atmosphere of the game. The game seems to operate without any problems and graphics are good. The only other problem I found was that I did not understand the little small thing in the middle of the screen is the airport as I thought the Potomic River at first was the runway and then I found that I had to get those planes on the small thing in the center! The 7 page manual describes the game and how it operates quite well. Other than the small problems, I found the game to be great and well actually I liked it a lot!

This is not a game where you just sit back and try to shoot something which requires very little thinking but here you must become an airtraffic controller and guide planes to the small

runway without running into each other, without flying over the city and at the same time handle any problems that they may have giving one plane priority over another to land. The game requires advanced planning and corrdination and as the game progresses tention builds and by the time the game ends you may be a nervous wreck as it can get to be more than you can handle especially at level 3! If you get frustrated easy, this game might not be for you as you will definately pull your hair out. But the game th requires much thought and increases my blood pressure like Tow does. Just what I like!!!

When the game ends a grade from A to F is given where anything below a B is not acceptable. On level 1 the highest I have been able to get so far is a B-! I give the game an overall rating of an A. The game is available for $9.95 from Tenex (plus shipping) and is available on cassette or disk. Requires only the Extended BASIC cartridge and a disk drive or cassette recorder...Gary Cox

GPL PROGRAMMING - PART 2

Last month I said I was going to show some actual GPL code and document it for everyone. Well, with my limited time and writing three other articles for the newsletter, I ran out of time for the article. Next month, I will have the next part in the series for all those GPL programmers out there...Beery Miller

EDITORS NOTE

Well another month has passed so here I am again. Last month I suggested that other Newsletters include more information about their BBS'S and Sysops so to follow up on the same, I have included a little article by each of the Sysop's here in Memphis. Also our contact persons are myself at 743-6781 and Gary Cox at 358-0667.

The May issue of MICROpendium is out and has a good list of User Groups but I see a few missing. If yours is missing or isn't complete or does not show contact phone number, metting days, newsletter etc., please write them with the information. Maybe we can get them to update the current list.

I want to thank everyone who are contrituting articles to the newsletter. It really makes my job a lot easier. Sometimes I do not get an article in the newsletter because I have a deadline to meet. After the newsletter is formatted and all set up, and then another article arrives, it is next to impossible for me to get it in and if the material is dated, then it wont work for the nex months newslatter.

Welcome to all new members and renewals. GO 99ER'S...Al Doss

PROTECTION

There are strong FEDERAL LAWS against duplicating copyrighted programs. Please do not break these laws!

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CALENDAR

MEETINGS: June 18th,July 16th, August 20th (3rd Thursday!)
WORKSHOPS: June 27th, July 25th, August 29th (4th Saturday!)

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